

Colonel Rusty Gilbert is The Civil Engineer for Air Education and Training Command at Randolph Air Force Base, TX. In this interview with *Air Force Civil Engineer* magazine, Colonel Gilbert discusses current challenges for AETC civil engineers in their work on ...

## The “Training Flightline”

**AFCE:** With the Air Force’s new focus on recruiting, has there been a tremendous increase in the number of people entering basic military training? If so, has this resulted in a strain on facilities at training bases?

**Colonel Gilbert:** “Yes” to both questions. Let me explain. AETC’s mission, quite simply, is to replenish the combat capability of the Air Force. This takes recruiting, training and educating. As you change the parameters in any one area, it has a “pig in the python” effect on facility infrastructure.

Facilities are critical to our mission areas. While everyone understands the relationship of airfields, operations facilities and hangars to flying, the corresponding relationship between dormitories, dining halls and classrooms — our training flightline — is either

overlooked or dismissed as quality of life improvements that can wait. They’re not. These are mission-critical facilities to this command and the Air Force.

The increased recruiting effort — both enlisted and officer — ramped up the number of recruiters from about 1,000 to a target of 1,650. This drove additional requirements for and upgrades to recruiting offices and had other rippling effects across the command. We have to bring an eighth recruit, housing and training dorm — a 1,000-person dormitory — back into service. We have to complete the officer training campus at Maxwell AFB, AL. We’re four dormitories short of capacity

for technical training requirements after basic military training. This shortage drives triple bunking at some of our bases, forces permanent party dorm residents off base and likewise sends students who are TDY to school downtown.

How are we addressing this challenge? Just like any major command (MAJCOM) — we fight for the re-

sources at the corporate table; we plan and execute every dollar we can beg, borrow, or steal; and we never miss an opportunity to showcase the good, the bad and the ugly.

**AFCE:** Since student living conditions are a key concern on AETC installations, what role did your staff play in ensuring support for student dorms in the Air Force Dormitory Master Plan?

**Colonel Gilbert:** The Air Force Dormitory Master Plan (DMP), I think, is a great corporate success story. It puts everyone on a more level playing field. With each iteration of the plan, the Air Force refines its focus to make sure we buy the right things.

We were successful in getting more focus on pipeline dormitories, from the standpoint of capacity and condition. Pipeline dormitories are to training what runways are to the Combat Air Forces. So, the four dorms we’re short of capacity will get funded through the DMP. Twelve of our 24 pipeline dorms that need to be replaced — not renovated, they’re that bad — will be replaced. But now, here’s the quandary. Can we hold out until then, and what do we do with the other 12 that aren’t “funded” for renovations or replacement in the DMP?

When our boss, Gen Hal Hornburg (AETC commander), returned from his first visit to Lackland AFB, TX — we had forewarned him of what he was going to see — he said, “While we may not be proud of all our facilities, we’re not going to be ashamed of them. The dormitory I went through is not fit to live in. Do something.” So, we asked him, “Boss, are you going to make us ‘lipstick the pig,’ or do what’s required and shut it down?” We’ve closed that dormitory and are tearing it down. Our guidance to our wings is simple — when dorms are no longer fit to live in, don’t. Show it to everyone. Money will come.

The last piece of dormitories is furnishings. We’ve been successful in the MAJCOM “food fight” for dollars — with a big push from Second Air Force — to buy over \$20 million worth of replacement furnishings in the last two years. This is a lot of money, but it’s just the tip of the iceberg because we still have almost \$15 million more to buy over the next 3-5 years.

**AFCE:** Because the services are required to implement joint training initiatives, many Air Force students train at



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schools located on Army or Navy installations. Are you also involved in providing facilities and accommodations for those students?

**Colonel Gilbert:** Civil Engineer Interservice Training Review Organization (ITRO) training happens at Goodfellow and Sheppard AFBs, TX; Fort Leonard Wood, MO; and Gulfport, MS. Under ITRO, the host is responsible for facilities and accommodations unless there is a service-specific training requirement. The rub always comes when there is a difference in facility standards and expectations — and it works both ways. The Air Force is not the only service short of facility dollars compared to requirements. Our leadership works many of these issues, and sometimes there is an opportunity to partner and leverage the funding available, including drumming up donations from other MAJCOMs and the other Services.

We recently made some quantum improvements for equipment operators at Fort Leonard Wood through the energy of the 366th Training Squadron, Det. 7, and generous contributions from Maj Gen [Earnest O.] Robbins and the MAJCOM Civil Engineers, and the combined execution by the Total Force RED HORSE and Prime BEEF teams. But, there's still more to do, especially in the dormitories. We focus on building a plan, getting buy-in, and then executing at every opportunity.

**AFCE:** What types of challenges do AETC engineers face in making sure pavements and operational facilities are up to par for the undergraduate pilot training program?

**Colonel Gilbert:** We fly the heck out of our airfields — almost 70,000 sorties per year at Laughlin AFB, TX, for example.

We started several years ago doing complete pavement condition surveys of all our bases, and this is now done. What many folks do not realize is that most of our flying-training bases have multiple runways as well as auxiliary airfields. We ran our engineering results past the operators, the fliers, to get their operational risk assessment. We are now putting the final touches on a Pavement Master Plan so that we know where to put the dollars to get the most bang for the buck — almost \$200 million worth of requirements.

We have, like most other MAJCOMs, a Facility Examination Team that also looks at base and airfield supporting infrastructure. We are also developing a standard for squadron operations facilities — where there isn't already an existing standard — so that when we get an opportunity to replace our inadequate facilities, we do it smartly.

**AFCE:** AETC stepped out as a leader in the housing privatization arena with the first successful Department

of Defense privatization effort at Lackland. Do you have other housing privatization efforts on the horizon?

**Colonel Gilbert:** The Lackland project is finished — 420 units — and by almost all measures is a success story. In the Air Force Family Housing Master Plan, our next privatization effort — already in progress — is at Little Rock AFB, AR, followed by Altus AFB, OK, another Lackland project, and down the road perhaps portions of Maxwell. We are trying to pull off another first with a public-private partnership with the City of San Angelo to meet the housing requirements at Goodfellow.

On privatization, I'm sure you're aware, there is some skepticism. Clearly there is more to learn as the process matures, and a lot of education that has to happen. For it to be a real success, it has to be transparent to the member who's living in it. Privatization will be successful where the conditions are right — I view it as just another tool in the toolbox.

**AFCE:** AETC has also been heavily involved in the A-76 competitive sourcing initiative, more so than the other major commands. How is this affecting the military and civilian members of your civil engineer squadrons?

**Colonel Gilbert:** From my perspective, A-76 is a four-letter word. This is a long and arduous process that has many unintended consequences, nuances and broken

AETC is much larger than most people realize. The command encompasses Air Force Recruiting Service, two numbered air forces, and Air University, which includes the Air Force Institute of Technology. AETC also has specialized training detachments at 44 locations around the world, including space and missile training at Vandenberg AFB, CA; special operations training at Kirtland AFB, NM; and survival training at Fairchild AFB, WA.

glass. Sometimes I hear that people don't want to come to an AETC base because there is no job or no future, and this is disappointing. Nothing could be further from the truth. For a commander or a member of these units, it is a leadership challenge of the highest magnitude. Why? As soon as you start the A-76 process, a large portion of the civilian workforce leaves if there is another job opportunity. For those who stay, part are sequestered to prepare the government's bid for the contract, and the remaining military and civilians have to shoulder the entire workload. You can't hire permanent replacements for vacancies, and the end date keeps moving to the right. This command and the Air Force owe those who have shouldered this burden tremendous gratitude for

their professionalism and dedication. But, hey ... would you expect anything less from a civil engineer?

Our approach to A-76 in AETC is different from most of the other MAJCOMs. We do not plan to piece-meal our CE squadrons or Base Operating Support (BOS). We've already done this with part of our Ops Flights at Goodfellow, Laughlin, Tyndall AFB, FL, and Columbus AFB, MS. While these are working great — be it a contractor or a civil service Most Efficient Organization — we felt there was a better way to do it. We've had an entire base, Vance AFB, OK, successfully operated by a contractor for well over 20 years.

Our current efforts target five major installations — Maxwell, Lackland, Sheppard, Randolph and Keesler AFBs — where we are competing the entire civil engineer squadron with the exception of the fire department and EOD (explosive ordnance disposal).

So, when it's all said and done, we will continue to have tremendous opportunities at Little Rock, Altus and Luke AFB, AZ — our keeper CE squadrons — and our hybrid squadrons at Goodfellow, Laughlin, Columbus and Tyndall.

**AFCE:** In the utilities privatization process, you have five "Pathfinder" bases in AETC. How successful has the program been so far? Do you expect benefits to accrue for AETC bases?

**Colonel Gilbert:** The bottom line is, it's really too early to tell. As far as our pathfinders in AETC, we don't group them as five bases — it's bigger than that. We have an effort at Maxwell, and then we have what we call the Texas Regional Demonstration Project (TRD), which incidentally includes more than just AETC bases in Texas — it also includes Dyess AFB, Ellington Air National Guard Base, Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Fort Worth (Navy Reserve) and Fort Bliss. All in all, we have 29 Air Force systems going through source selection right now — almost 65 percent of the Air Force's 45 Pathfinders. Will UP be a success? As I said, it's too early to tell. We'll have a better feel for it this spring and summer when we expect to award the TRD and Maxwell/Gunter efforts.

Under privatization, we expect costs to increase in the short term. In the long term, we expect improved reliability as the new owners make the capital improvements that are needed. Over the long haul, privatization must show an economic payback, or we don't privatize. Stay tuned.

A couple of comments on competitive sourcing and privatization efforts — these are "forever" decisions, that in many respects are equivalent to putting BOS on the "MasterCard Plan." We make the minimum payments and then keep paying forever as we go through recompetes, cost escalations and fixing disconnects. We

have to recognize there is a difference between cost avoidance and cost savings, and we should not be claiming victory, beating our chests, and taking manpower and budget cuts before the event occurs. It would be nice if the savings that did occur were plowed back into those areas that generated them.

**AFCE:** Realignment of the former Kelly AFB, TX, concluded in July, with a sizeable part of the base incorporated into nearby Lackland. What type of impact does this have on your CE squadron at Lackland?

**Colonel Gilbert:** The realignment of Kelly has been a five-year process that has taken a whole lot of effort on the part of a lot of people both in and out of government. Today, Lackland has more than 24,000 people and, for the first time, a runway. We've got a long-term "Go West Plan" to move those portions of Air Force activities on the city side over to Lackland proper.

The CE squadron played a key role at a time when we also put A-76, privatized housing and utility privatization on them. As General Robbins once said, "the peacetime role of a MAJCOM headquarters is to simulate the enemy" and we have fulfilled this with oak leaf clusters. However, the CE squadron at Lackland has come through in Timex fashion — it took a licking and kept on ticking — again reflecting leadership challenges of the highest order.

I'm proud to be an Air Force member and being a civil engineer is just icing on the cake. We're extremely well served by our leadership, and the leadership coming behind is going to be even better. The engineers at Little Rock have a motto — "Engineers Carry the Load." To that, there's only one response — "HOOAH".

AETC bases are all located in the southern tier: Altus and Vance in Oklahoma; Goodfellow, Lackland, Laughlin, Randolph and Sheppard in Texas; Columbus and Keesler in Mississippi; Maxwell in Alabama; Little Rock in Arkansas; Luke in Arizona; and Tyndall in Florida.